

Proceeding: In the matter of 1998 Biennial Review -- Review of Accounts Settlement in the ☒ Record 1 of 1  
Applicant Name: National Marine Electronics Association, Inc.=20  
Proceeding Name: 98-96 Author Name: National Marine Electronics As  
Lawfirm Name: =20  
Contact Name: =20 Contact Email: nmea@coastalnet.com  
Address Line 1: P. O. Box 3435=20  
Address Line 2: 2302 Hwy. 70 East=20  
City: New Bern=20 State: NC ☒  
Zip Code: 28564 Postal Code:   
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The National Marine Electronics Association (NMEA) respectfully submits comments in response to the FCC NPRM in the above-referenced proceeding released July 17, 1998 with comments due August 24, 1998.

The FCC, in this NPRM, is proposing to withdraw as a nationwide clearinghouse for settling accounts for maritime mobile, maritime satellite, aircraft, and hand-held terminal radio services. The FCC proposes instead to rely upon private accounting authorities, certified under Part 3 of the Commission's Rules and operating under the regulatory oversight of Commission staff, to perform these functions. The FCC proposes to modify Section 3.10(e) to make clear that private entities certified under their rules, with certain exceptions, have a duty to deal with the public in a non-discriminatory manner. The FCC proposes to withhold action on all applications now pending before the Commission for certification as an accounting authority until the outcome of this NPRM, and to require applicants to amend their applications to reflect any changes to their rules adopted as a result of this NPRM. =20

The NMEA is comprised of dealers who sell, service and install electronic equipment onboard vessels and manufacturers who manufacture and sell to such dealers electronic equipment onboard vessels including maritime mobile and maritime satellite equipment. We address the following concerns: =20

Withdrawal by the Commission from Accounting Authority Function:

1. Appointing certified accounting authorities who are in direct competition with providers of the maritime satellite communications equipment to replace the FCC as an accounting authority. Several of the accounting authorities currently certified by the FCC are in direct competition with NMEA dealers who sell, commission & service maritime satellite communications equipment. =20
2. Commissioning of the maritime satellite communications equipment is provided mainly by a servicing marine electronic dealer not the consumer. = A large number of consumers have little or no knowledge of the FCC as their accounting authority for their maritime satellite communications outside the U.S., if any.
3. Notification to all vessels currently using the FCC as the accounting authority would require a smooth transition in order to ensure ship safety is not affected. =20

Accounting Authority of Last Resort:

1. The accounting authority of last resort must be an entity which is not in direct competition with any service provider of satellite communication equipment/services.
2. Requiring customers to pre-subscribe to an accounting authority before commissioning, designating an authority for every message, or distributing messages among several private authorities would be cumbersome and prone to a breakdown somewhere in the process.

"Grandfathered" Accounting Authorities:

1. NMEA would support the "grandfathered" status of EXXON as currently arranged with the FCC.
2. NMEA would support the FCC's right to require a "grandfathered" entity to serve the public at some later date if the scope of the entity's business changed.

Pending Applications/Application Procedures:

1. All private accounting authorities, pending or certified, should be required to show how they propose to fulfill the non-discrimination obligation.

Notes of Interest:

A sampling of NMEA members, 4 manufacturers of maritime satellite communications equipment and 4 dealers who sell/commission/service maritime satellite communications equipment, found that none (zero) knew of the FCC=92s desire to withdraw as the accounting authority. =20

Several of the certified accounting authorities are members of the NMEA, and as such, are in direct competition with dozens of other NMEA members who sell, commission and service maritime satellite communications equipment. = Most NMEA dealers will be very uncomfortable in supplying their customer information to a competitor giving them the opportunity to solicit business from that customer. =20

The NMEA recommends the FCC:

1. Certify an accounting authority of last resort who is not in direct competition with the sales and service providers of maritime satellite communications equipment.
2. Establish a smooth transition allotting a reasonable period of time for notice to all current vessels regarding the FCC=92s withdrawal as an accounting authority to ensure continuation of maritime satellite communications services, the chance to change accounting authorities and to ensure safety is not affected by the rule change.
3. Establish a method to ensure the charges by private accounting authorities are reasonable and remain so compared to current FCC charges.
4. Establish a method to ensure private accounting authorities provide services to the public in a non-discriminatory manner.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL MARINE ELECTRONICS ASSOCIATION

Cindy Ensley  
Executive Director  
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Thanks

Cindy

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Cindy Ensley  
NMEA Executive Director  
P O Box 3435

New Bern, NC 28564-3435

USA

phone: 252-638-2626

fax: 252-638-4885

e-mail: [nmea@coastalnet.com](mailto:nmea@coastalnet.com)

Internet: [www.nmea.org](http://www.nmea.org)

"To stay abreast of changes in the marine electronics industry,  
join the NMEA today!"

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